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DIA WASHINGTON DC  
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
SECDEF WASHDC  
CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI//APCW/APOP//  
CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000368

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER), SCA/INS AND PRM  
STATE ALSO PASS USAID  
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN)  
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)  
ATHENS FOR PCARTER  
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER)  
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA AND POL (SBERRY)  
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)  
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)  
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY  
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 43

Ref: A) Colombo 361 B) Colombo 360 C) Colombo 357 D) Colombo 351  
E) Colombo 342 F) Colombo 329 G) Colombo 321 H) Colombo 320 I)  
Colombo 316 J) Colombo 310 K) Colombo 307

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Walter Kaelin, UN Special Rapporteur for IDPs will visit Sri Lanka April 2-6. ICRC President Kellenberger has tentative plans to visit Sri Lanka starting April 9. India is sending additional equipment and personnel to support the GOI's field hospital in Pulmoddai. Last week's visit by Indian Prime Minister's Principal Secretary T.K.A. Nair did not break any new political ground. Foreign Secretary Kohona downplayed press reports of GSL consideration of a humanitarian pause in fighting and gave little ground on MFA clearance for Red Cross visas. Approximately 5,000 civilians escaped the safe zone on March 30, according to Kohona. The ICRC evacuated 540 wounded and relatives on March 30. End Summary.

Visits

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2. (SBU) UNHRC Representative Amin Awad confirmed to the Embassy on March 31 that UN Special Raporteur for IDPs Walter Kaelin will visit Sri Lank April 2-6. He thanked the Embassy for its advocay with the GSL. At Awad's request, Ambassador will host a meeting for Kaelin with Co-Chair Ambassadors early in the visit. ICRC Representative Paul Castella informed the Embassy that ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger has tentative plans to visit Sri Lanka starting April 9.

Government of India Provides New  
Assistance for Field Hospital

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13. (SBU) Indian DCM Vikram Misri reported to DCM that the Government of India is sending equipment (ventilators, x-ray machines, operating tables, etc.) for an additional operating theatre at the field hospital at Pulmoddai, the current evacuation site from the safe zone. A team of ten medical personnel, including one surgeon and one anesthesiologist, and the equipment will arrive at Pulmoddai on March 31. A plane load of additional medicine will be brought in for the Pulmoddai field hospital. Misri explained that the expanded capacity is required to treat the large number of wounded civilians who are arriving at Pulmoddai. The last two boatloads of evacuees each carried approximately 140 patients who required immediate treatment, mostly for blast and bullet wounds. Once patients are stabilized, the Ministry of Health arranges for their onward movement to other hospitals or IDP transit sites.

Visit by Indian Official:  
No New Political Ground  
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14. (SBU) Misri also told DCM that last week's visit to Colombo by the Indian Prime Minister's Principal Secretary T.K.A. Nair did not break any new ground. In a meeting with President Rajapaksa and other GSL officials, Nair discussed the need for a credible devolution and political package and ways in which India might be able to provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in the North. Misri emphasized, however, that Nair came to Colombo

primarily to address a conference of Sri Lankan civil servants on governance issues and to share with them insights based on his four decades of experience as a government administrator.

GSL Considering Humanitarian Pause  
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15. (U) Press reports carried statements by Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona, Defense Spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella and Media Centre for National Security Director General Lakshman Hulugalle indicating that the government was considering a humanitarian pause in fighting. The statements echoed earlier comments from the Foreign Minister (Ref C). In a March 31 meeting Ambassador asked Kohona about possible GSL support for a humanitarian pause. Kohona drew a distinction between short "ad hoc" pauses, which he said the GSL already is doing to allow evacuation of wounded and delivery of food and medicine. The Foreign Secretary said that now that the military is closing in on the safe zone, it believes more and more civilians will try to escape. For example, 5,000 civilians had waded across the lagoon in the northern part of the safe zone during intensive fighting on March 30 further south. Since the military was now close enough that they could see when groups of civilians were trying to leave, they would hold fire and facilitate such escapes whenever possible. The GSL was also prepared to consider longer term pauses to allow larger scale evacuations, Kohona said.

GSL Gives Little Ground on ICRC Visas  
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16. (SBU) Ambassador also pressed Kohona to approve the backlog of ICRC visas. Ambassador stressed that ICRC had done a superb job under exceptionally challenging circumstances helping to deliver food and medicine to the safe zone and evacuate sick and wounded from there. It also continued to perform a wide range of essential tasks in the rest of the country. Kohona agreed the ICRC had done a great job, but said that some in the GSL were now questioning why ICRC needed more staff when some of its functions had now stopped, such as its previous work transferring dead bodies of combatants across the forward defense line.

17. (SBU) Ambassador pushed back, noting that its range of tasks had increased, not decreased, and would increase further if it had to facilitate a large-scale evacuation of civilians from the north. Surely the GSL wanted the ICRC to be prepared to support this GSL goal, the Ambassador asked. Kohona allowed that the MFA had approved four ICRC visas, but was carefully reviewing all the other requests, with a view to considering which of these billets the ICRC might fill with locally-recruited staff. Ambassador conveyed the substance of the conversation to ICRC Chief Castella and suggested Castella provide more details on exactly what the replacement and TDY staff - for whom visas were needed - would be doing. Castella

thanked us for the intervention and will follow up directly with the MFA.

#### ICRC Evacuates 540 Civilians

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¶18. (U) ICRC spokesperson in Colombo Sophie Romanens told the BBC that 540 patients and relatives were evacuated by sea on March 30.

This brings the total number of civilians evacuated by the ICRC to approximately 6500 since February. ICRC is planning the next evacuation for April 2.

#### GSL: 300 Children Reunited With Families

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¶19. (U) The Ministry for Disaster Management and Human Rights announced 300 children who were separated from their families while crossing over to cleared areas in Vavuniya have been reunited with their families today (March 31).

#### GSL Backs Off Demand to NGOs to Turn Over Assets

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¶10. (SBU) During the Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA) meeting on March 30, GSL officials present agreed that the request to NGOs to turn over their assets to the government (Ref D) was too extreme. We expect the request will be scaled back or removed entirely.

#### Five Bishops Urge Protection of Civilians

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¶11. (U) Five Bishops published a letter expressing their extreme concern for the plight of civilians trapped in the conflict and urging continued evacuations of wounded from, and shipments of food into, the safe zone. The Bishops called for negotiations to permit the evacuation of all civilians who wished to leave the conflict area and for a "temporary cessation of fighting" to facilitate that evacuation. The letter was signed by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Jaffna, Mannar and Anuradhapura, as well as the Anglican Bishops of Colombo and Kurunegala.

#### Civilian Casualties and IDP Outflow

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¶12. (SBU) Sources from within the LTTE-controlled area report 112 civilians were killed and 164 injured on March 30. Tamil and Government sources report 1,648 arrivals, including 709 children into Government-controlled territory on March 30. (Note: Such reports from Tamil sources cannot be confirmed and are frequently exaggerated. The GSL has yet to publicize the Foreign Secretary's claim to Ambassador that 5000 civilians escaped during fighting on March 30.)

BLAKE